

# Philosophy of aesthetics

The recovery and the adaptation of the Kantian aesthetics by the speculative art theory by Hegel

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## 1 Introduction

Hegel's speculative theory of art undoubtedly differs in essential points from the philosophy of Kantian esthetics. Whereas Jean-Marie Schaeffer's statement about the crisis of the legitimation of art as a crisis of the discourse of its legitimation stands as another approach to understanding the situation of esthetics. Essentially, Kant and Hegel agree in the context of the romantic art movement to define the ontologically cognitive function of art as primarily philosophical content. This explains the basic intention of Schaffer, who regrets the loss of esthetic pleasure and artistic experience. Since art and thus the creative instances are primarily in a representational role, in Kant unconsciously through the theory of genius, in the theories of the romantics through the autotelia of the work of art, and in Hegel through a conscious externalization of the mind through the imagination, every work of art is necessarily the bearer of a deeper meaning, conscious

or unconscious, intentional or incomprehensible to the creative artist. In this context, Kant introduces the concept of the creative imagination, which thus allows to give to the artificial works of art the peculiarities of strength and purity of the natural beauty, by abbreviating internal intuitions directly to the productive imagination without resorting to the concepts of comprehension. This also allows an explanation of Fine Art as a unit of teaching, through the mechanical art which is indeed, according to Kant, a learnable faculty. The product of artistic genius, however, differs substantially from Hegel's, since for Kant the internal intuitions are manifested in a newly formed nature which, in conclusion, objectifies and thus externalizes the by definition indeterminable intentions. For Hegel, on the other hand, art is the manifestation of the absolute spirit in a sensitive form and thus constitutes the most important interface, followed by religion and philosophy, between the self and the world, which was sought to be transcended in romanticism. In the division into the science of logic, the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of the spirit, art gives the possibility to access the philosophical truths that would remain closed to man in the science of logic and would take place only through the auto-definition of the concepts themselves. However, attention must be paid to the conceptual distinction made by

Kant and Hegel between, respectively, ethics and art. Furthermore, there is an important difference in the nature of the art to be perceived, which in Hegel is clearly of hermeneutic character and shares essentially the same content with any further work of art, since the finality of art merely symbolizes the truth of the reality of the idea and thus gives access to the philosophical ontology. In the case of Kantian esthetic understanding, on the other hand, true art should manifest itself without intentions but rather as an object that shows the form of the purpose as such.

## 2 Critique

After two centuries, the situation of art is clearly different from the one foreseen by Hegel, who describes the finite character of philosophy and thus its completion through his self-deploying system. In the full conclusion this means for the art that this will reach its end as a means to the access to the philosophy likewise. Obviously our today's time as well as that of the past century reflects contrary to Hegel's theory a large variety of art realizations and manifestations, it is to be spoken even of an extension of the artistic field. However, according to Schaeffer, this very art is facing a crisis.

Hegel describes in his theory of art an evaluative character of artwork which is justified by the absence of usefulness of true artistic work and thus is on the side of reason. This means that the objects considered by Hegel to be true works of art establish their own purpose in their being, and thus in a sensitive way, unlike religion and philosophy, manifest the true idea in form. In contrast to Kant, this process takes place intentionally controlled by the mind and is thus considered a conscious externalization of the intention through the imagination. Where before romanticism art was re-

garded as subjective feeling, esthetic perception, by Kant as criticism of the judgment of taste, in the Hegelian system it acquires a more fundamental character as one of the three essential ways to access the philosophy of concepts.

Based on the self-evolving philosophical approach of concepts by contradiction, Hegel has autonomized philosophy and thus removed and abstracted it from man as thinking organism. This unfolding is described as a movement, but it can only be defined as such at the moment when space and time, in other words nature, can exert its influence, in which case the sphere is called the philosophy of nature. Last but not least, we humans, who from nature, in which we are physically anchored, with our imagination, which is now no longer, or only to a conditional part, bound to the physical laws of our material world, seek an access to the theological philosophy and thus cause a renewed abstraction of the ontological considerations. Here, according to Hegel, art, in a sensitive way, plays an essential role in enabling the access to the self-deploying philosophy.

Such thought processes are of high demand and provide potential answers to essential questions of our time concerning art, such as: What is art? When does an object become a work of art, or does art manifest itself only in objects such as writings and paintings, or can traditions, thoughts, and immaterial impressions be considered art? Hegel's definition of art as access to absolute truth provides a clear and at the same time extremely vague explanation.

Of course, if art is considered under a philosophical aspect, it is treated as a finality for a certain purpose, since it can be classified by Hegel as well as Kant as a suitable part of the overall theory. However, this view raises problems in the self-understanding of the artists. With Hegel, this is less critical than with Kant, since in the latter, by definition of a masterpiece, the artist is the executive force of genius,

which is inaccessible to the artist on a logical and rational level, and thus remains closed to the viewer on an analytical level. This has a tendency to sacralize art, which became increasingly evident in the Romantic period, and as a major drawback, brings about the crisis of art by completely ignoring the pure human pleasure in aesthetics. We, as human beings, can enjoy certain senses and impressions, diverse sensations, without denying a philosophical finality. Of course, it is not easy to prove the pleasure of aesthetics without philosophical finality, since in the inaccessible to us, the access to the true absolute could show itself precisely through this pleasure felt by ourselves. However, the understanding of art and the claim to aesthetics should entail universal values, and be theoretically empirically provable according to the degree to which these very creations provide access to the absolute, the true idea. Kant's judgment of taste is closer to the concept of aesthetic pleasure, arising from a free interplay of the imagination and the mind, the "beautiful" is defined universally but individually at the same time. We are indeed able to communicate what we perceive as beautiful and are also able to understand what our fellow men perceive as beautiful.

Another point of Hegel's theory is the explanation of the finite character of art and thus also of philosophy. Through the self-deploying system of philosophy established by Hegel, which, starting from the concept of being, defines itself through continuous negation and is thus finite by definition, art, as merely a means of access to the theological-ontological absolute, also becomes finite. As an essential paradox the question of finality arises in the Hegelian system, since the spreading of the system develops in a sphere, the science of logic, which is independent of time and space, this movement between the concepts and the spreading of the definition of these very concepts is already completed or by definition never to be

seen as a movement but from the beginning as a spreading system. The described movement takes place only in the sphere of the philosophy of the nature and philosophy of the spirit since here, above all in first mentioned, the worldly physical composed space and time play a role. Therefore, Hegel's statement that art sooner or later reaches its completion can theoretically be seen as finished from the beginning. The unfolding of philosophy, art and religion in the sphere of the philosophy of mind is only conditioned by the temporal character. However, according to Hegel, the content of art is constant and varied only by historicity and materiality. Since these two factors are not limited in time and therefore have no final character, art cannot be finite.

Another criticism of Kant's aesthetics, as well as those of the Romantics and Hegel, is the limitation of art to partial aspects of today's accepted conception of art. Poetry and fine arts are by far not sufficient to describe the diversity of *Kunstschöpfung*, because creations that are difficult to objectify, such as music, theater, or even action art, remain unnoticed, especially in the theory of Romanticism. However, Kantian and Hegelian aesthetics allow a definition that can be transposed to non-materialized art. Hegel's self-definition of philosophical concepts is appropriate in our time and can be seen as an analogy to the natural concepts of the natural sciences. Thus, the task of a mathematician is in no case to create new knowledge but only to comprehend the existing connections and to enable us as thinking creatures to access this existing knowledge by the possibility of combining established and comprehensible laws, in Kant's words, a synthetic judgment a priori. This can be applied to any field of natural knowledge and thus to the whole sphere of the philosophy of nature. If we now unfold art, religion and philosophy in this accomplished realm through the philosophy of mind, then it may be concluded that these very man-

ifestations can be nothing but finite in their propagation. Thus, the final character would not be determined by the content, as described by Hegel, but rather by the finiteness of the sphere in which these realms manifest themselves. However, to confirm this assumption, the imagination or Kantian productive imagination would also have to be finite. Since the spirit is only conditionally subject to the natural laws and in the case of the collective spirit is fully independent, the definition of completion no longer applies here.

Furthermore, it is undeniable that art has always sought to make intangible ideas accessible without becoming too explicit in their expression, which in a broader sense can be seen as the striving for the sensitive representation of the absolute spirit, the unity between individual and universal. Thus, Hegel's theory of artistic creation as a manifestation of the absolute spirit would provide an explanatory approach to the intended content of these works of art. However, it has become apparent, especially in the past two centuries, that works of art attempt to convey emotions which, according to Kant's theory, merely serve to stimulate individually felt intuitions, as in the example of impressionism or, even more clearly, in the course of expressionism. Furthermore, the art of our time carries to a large extent socio-political messages which to a certain extent contain judgments about the current circumstances and thus critiques of the system and its structure. This would clearly contrast with Kant's conception of works of art as manifestations of genius, since the works described have a clearly intentional character. Furthermore, this type of art contradicts Hegel's theory of art as well as that of the Romantics, since the content evidently does not contribute to the approximation of absolute being but strives for a direct connection between the philosophy of the spirit and the philosophy of nature without having a distinctly ontological character.

### 3 Conclusion

The speculative theory of art of the romantics, as well as the one of Hegel, is indeed at the root of the crisis of the discourse on the legitimation of art. Important aspects of the art we know, such as the aesthetic experience and the aesthetic pleasure, are lost through a sacralization of the creation of art by the evaluative striving for a sensitive manifestation of the access to the absolute. A return to Kant's aesthetic judgment is preferable in this respect, but here, too, there are conditions, such as the theory of genius, which could lead to a potential crisis in the discourse on the theory of art. Defining the beautiful as a judgment of taste without interest, however, also poses difficulties, since this would mean that the politically, socially, and socio-critical works of art of our time would lose their status as aesthetically sophisticated art. It should be said that Kant's theory focuses primarily on the ethical judgment and less on the creation of art as such, which could mean that Kant's theory of the ethical understanding describes only the individual relationship between subject and object and thus only one aspect of the understanding of art, which can be extended by the content and the intentional message.

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